

# Fula language

**Fula** /'fu:lə/[2], also known as **Fulani** /fu'la:nɪ/[2] or **Fulah**[3][4][5] (Fula: *Fulfulde*, *Pulaar*, *Pular*; French: *Peul*), is a Senegambian language spoken as a set of various dialects in a continuum that stretches across some 20 countries in West and Central Africa by more than 65 million people. Along with other related languages such as Serer and Wolof, it belongs to the Senegambian branch within the Niger–Congo family, which does not have tones, unlike most other Niger–Congo languages. More broadly, it belongs to the Atlantic geographic grouping within Niger–Congo. It is spoken as a first language by the Fula people ("Fulani", Fula: *Fulbe*) from the Senegambia region and Guinea to Cameroon, Nigeria, and Sudan and by related groups such as the Toucouleur people in the Senegal River Valley. It is also spoken as a second language by various peoples in the region, such as the Kirdi of northern Cameroon and northeastern Nigeria.

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Fula	
Native to	Western Africa
Region	The Sahel
Ethnicity	Fula
Language family	Niger–Congo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Atlantic–Congo</li> <li>▪ Atlantic</li> <li>▪ Senegambian</li> <li>▪ Fula–Serer</li> <li>▪ <b>Fula</b></li> </ul>
Writing system	Latin Arabic Adlam
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	ff ( <a href="https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ff">https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ff</a> ) – Fulah
ISO 639-2	ful ( <a href="https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=151">https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=151</a> ) – Fulah
ISO 639-3	ful – inclusive code – Fulah Individual codes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fuc – Pulaar (Senegambia, Mauritania)</li> <li>fuf – Pular (Guinea, Sierra Leone)</li> <li>ffm – Maasina Fulfulde (Mali, Ghana)</li> <li>fue – Borgu Fulfulde (Benin, Togo)</li> <li>fuh – Western Niger (Burkina, Niger)</li> <li>fuq – Central–Eastern Niger (Niger)</li> <li>fuv – Nigerian Fulfulde (Nigeria)</li> <li>fub – Adamawa Fulfulde (Cameroon, Chad, Sudan)</li> <li>fui – Bagirmi Fulfulde (CAR)</li> </ul>
Glottolog	<a href="http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/fula1264">http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/fula1264</a> [1]
	

## Nomenclature

Several names are applied to the language, just as to the Fula people. They call their language *Pulaar* or *Pular* in the western dialects and *Fulfulde* in the central and eastern dialects. *Fula*, *Fulah* and *Fulani* in English come originally from Manding (esp. Mandinka, but also Malinke and Bamana) and Hausa, respectively; *Peul* in French, also occasionally found in literature in English, comes from Wolof.

## Morphology

Fula is based on verbonominal roots, from which verbal, noun, and modifier words are derived. It uses suffixes (sometimes inaccurately called infixes, as they come between the root and the inflectional ending) to modify meaning. These suffixes often serve the same purposes in Fula that prepositions do in English.

## Noun classes

The Fula or Fulfulde language is characterized by a robust noun class system, with 24 to 26 noun classes being common across the Fulfulde dialects.<sup>[6]</sup> Noun classes in Fula are abstract categories with some classes having semantic attributes that characterize a subset of that class' members, and others being marked by a membership too diverse to warrant any semantic categorization of the class' members.<sup>[7]</sup> For example, classes are for stringy, long things, and another for big things, another for liquids, a noun class for strong, rigid objects, another for human or humanoid traits etc. Gender does not have any role in the Fula noun class system and the marking of gender is done with adjectives rather than class markers.<sup>[8]</sup> Noun classes are marked by suffixes on nouns. These suffixes are the same as the class name, though they are frequently subject to phonological processes, most frequently the dropping of the suffix's initial consonant.<sup>[9]</sup>

The table below illustrates the class name, the semantic property associated with class membership, and an example of a noun with its class marker. Classes 1 and 2 can be described as personal classes, classes 3-6 as diminutive classes, classes 7-8 as augmentative classes, and classes 9-25 as neutral classes. It is formed on the basis of McIntosh's 1984 description of Kaceccereere Fulfulde, which the author describes as "essentially the same" as Arnott's 1970 description of the noun classes of the Gombe dialect of Fula. Thus, certain examples from Arnott also informed this table.<sup>[10][11]</sup>

Person	Pullo
People	Fulbe
Language	Fulfulde

Number	Class name	Meaning	Example
1.	o	Person singular	laam-do 'chief'; also loan words
2.	be	Person plural	laam-be 'chiefs'
3.	ngel	Diminutive singular	loo-ngel 'little pot'
4.	kal	Diminutive quantities	con-al 'small quantity of flour'
5.	ngum/kum	Diminutive pejorative	laam-ngum/laam-kum 'worthless little chief'
6.	kon/koy	Diminutive plural	ullu-kon/ullu-koy 'small cats/kittens'
7.	nde	Various, including globular objects, places, times	loo-nde 'storage pot'
8.	ndi	Various, including uncountable nouns	com-ri 'tiredness'
9.	ndu	Various	ullu-ndu 'cat'
10.	nga	Various, including some large animals	nood-a 'crocodile'
11.	nge	mainly for 'cow,' 'fire,' 'sun' 'hunger,'	nagg-e 'cow'
12.	ngo	Various	juu-ngo 'hand'
13.	ngu	Various	bow-ngu 'mosquito'
14.	ngal	Various including augmentative singular	dem-ngal 'tongue'
15.	ngol	Various, often long things	bog-gol 'rope'
16.	ngii/ngil	Various including augmentative singular	bog-gii/bog-gii 'big rope'
17.	ka	Various	laan-a 'boat'
18.	ki	Various	leki 'tree'
19.	ko	Various	haak-o 'soup'
20.	kol	'Calf' 'foal'	ñal-ol 'calf', mol-ol 'foal'
21.	dam	mainly for Liquids	lam-dam 'salt', ndiy-am 'water'
22.	dum	Neutral	maw-dum 'big thing'
23.	de	Nonhuman plural	juu-de 'hands'
24.	di	Nonhuman plural	na'i 'cows'

## Voice

Verbs in Fula are usually classed in three voices: active, middle, and passive.<sup>[12]</sup> Not every root is used in all voices. Some middle-voice verbs are reflexive.

A common example are verbs from the root *loot-*:

- *lootude*, to wash (something) [active voice]
- *lootaade*, to wash (oneself) [middle voice]
- *looteede*, to be washed [passive voice]

## Consonant mutation

Another feature of the language is initial consonant mutation between singular and plural forms of nouns and of verbs (except in Pular, no consonant mutation exists in verbs, only in nouns).

A simplified schema is:

- w ↔ b ↔ mb
- r ↔ d ↔ nd
- y ↔ j ↔ nj
- w ↔ g ↔ ng
- f ↔ p
- s ↔ c
- h ↔ k

## Pronouns

Fula has inclusive and exclusive first-person plural pronouns. The inclusive pronouns include both the speaker and those being spoken to, while the exclusive pronouns exclude the listeners.

The pronoun that corresponds to a given noun is determined by the noun class. Because men and women belong to the same noun class, the English pronouns "he" and "she" are translated into Fula by the same pronoun. However, depending on the dialect, there are some 25 different noun classes, each with its own pronoun. Sometimes those pronouns have both a nominative case (i.e., used as verb subject) and an accusative or dative case (i.e., used as a verb object) as well as a possessive form. Relative pronouns generally take the same form as the nominative.

## Varieties

While there are numerous varieties of Fula, it is typically regarded as a single language. Wilson (1989) states that "travelers over wide distances never find communication impossible," and Ka (1991) concludes that despite its geographic span and dialect variation, Fulfulde is still fundamentally one language.<sup>[13]</sup> However, *Ethnologue* has found that nine different translations are needed to make the Bible comprehensible for most Fula speakers, and it treats these varieties as separate languages. They are listed in the box at the beginning of this article.

## Status

Fulfulde is an official language in Senegal (*Pulaar*), an official *lingua franca* in Guinea, Senegambia, Maasina (Inner Niger Delta), North Eastern Nigeria and Northern Cameroon, precisely in Adamawa regions of the two countries (*Fulfulde*), where many speakers are bilingual, and a local language in many African countries, such as Mauritania, Mali, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Togo, Ghana, Benin and Niger.

## Writing systems and phonology

### Latin alphabet

When written using the Latin script, Fula uses the following additional special "hooked" characters to distinguish meaningfully different sounds in the language: **B/b** [b], **D/d** [d], **ŋ/ŋ** [ŋ], **ɲ/ɲ** [ɲ], **Y/y** [?j]. The letters **c**, **j**, and **r**, respectively represent the sounds [c ~ tʃ], [ʃ ~ dʒ], and [r]. Double vowel characters indicate that the vowels are elongated. An apostrophe (') is used as a glottal stop. It uses the five vowel system denoting vowel sounds and their lengths. In Nigeria 'y substitutes y, and in Senegal Ñ/ñ is used instead of ɲ.

### Sample Fula alphabet

**a, aa, b, mb (or nb), b, c, d, nd, d, e, ee, f, g, ng, h, i, ii, j, nj, k, l, m, n, ɲ, ñ (ny or ñ), o, oo, p, r, s, t, u, uu, w, y, Y or 'y, '**

The letters **q, v, x, z** are used in some cases for loan words.

Fula Alphabets																															
A	B	Mb	B	C	D	Nd	D	E	F	G	Ng	H	!	J	Nj	K	L	M	N	D	N	O	P	R	S	T	U	W	Y	Y	'
Lowercase																															
a	b	mb	b	c	d	nd	d	e	f	g	ng	h	i	j	nj	k	l	m	n	ŋ	ñ	o	p	r	s	t	u	w	y	y	'
Phonetic value																															
a	b	mb	b	c	d	nd	d	ɛ	f	g	ŋ	h	i	ʃ	ʒ	l	m	n	ŋ	ñ	ɔ	p	r	s	t	u	w	j	?j	?	

Long vowels are written doubled: <aa, ee, ii, oo, uu> The standard Fulfulde alphabet adopted during the UNESCO-sponsored expert meeting in Bamako in March 1966 is as follows:<sup>[14]</sup> a, b, mb, b, c, d, nd, d, e, f, g, ng, h, i, j, nj, k, l, m, n, ɲ, ny (later ñ or ñ), o, p, r, s, t, u, w, y, y, '.

## Phonology

### Consonants

		Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal	
						plain	pal.
Plosive	plain	p	t	c ~ tʃ	k	?	?j
	voiced	b	d	ʃ ~ dʒ	g		
	prenasal	mb	nd	ŋ ~ ɲ	ŋ		
<b>Implosive</b>		b	d				
<b>Fricative</b>		f	s		h		
<b>Nasal</b>		m	n	ŋ	ŋ		
<b>Trill</b>			r				
<b>Lateral</b>			l				
<b>Approximant</b>				j	w		

The two sounds /c/ and /ʃ/, may be realized as affricate sounds [tʃ] and [dʒ].

## Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Mid	e		o
Open		a	

Short /i e o u/ vowel sounds can also be realized as [ɪ ɛ ɔ ʊ]. Long vowel sounds can occur as /i: e: a: o: u:/.

## Arabic script

Fula has also been written in the Arabic script or *Ajami* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20180114133025/http://www.mafindi.com/blogs/1/10/how-to-write-fulde-in-ajami-baleri-e-masle>) since before colonization by many scholars and learned people including Usman dan Fodio and the early emirs of the northern Nigeria emirates. This continues to a certain degree and notably in some areas like Guinea and Cameroon.

In fact, Fula retains many Arabic loanwords.

## Adlam script

There were unsuccessful efforts in the 1950s and 1960s to create a unique script to write Fulfulde. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, two teenage brothers, Ibrahima and Abdoulaye Barry from the Nzérékoré Region of Guinea, created the Adlam script, which accurately represents all the sounds of Fulani. The script is written from right to left and includes 28 letters with 5 vowels and 23 consonants.<sup>[15][16][17]</sup>

## See also

- Pular grammar (a presentation for one variety of Fula)

## References

## Works

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- *Grammar of the Fulde Language: With an Appendix of Some Original Traditions and Portions of Scripture Translated Into Fulde: Together with Eight Chapters of the Book of Genesis* ([https://books.google.com/books?id=1qUTAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=1qUTAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)). Church Missionary House. 1876.
- *Grammar of the Fulde Language: With an Appendix of Some Original Traditions and Portions of Scripture Translated Into Fulde: Together with Eight Chapters of the Book of Genesis* ([https://books.google.com/books?id=VC8OAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=VC8OAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)). Church Missionary House. 1876.

Adlam Pular	
<b>Ադլամ պալա</b>	
Type	Alphabet
Languages	Fula
Time period	Invented 1989
Direction	Right-to-left
ISO 15924	Adlm, 166
Unicode alias	Adlam
Unicode range	U+1E900–U+1E95F ( <a href="https://www.unicode.org/charts/PDF/U1E900.pdf">https://www.unicode.org/charts/PDF/U1E900.pdf</a> )

## Notes

1. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Fula" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/fula1264>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
2. Laurie Bauer, 2007, *The Linguistics Student's Handbook*, Edinburgh
3. "Fulah" (<http://www.ethnologue.com/19/language/ful/>). *Ethnologue* (19 ed.). 2016.
4. "Documentation for ISO 639 identifier: ful" ([https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes\\_name.php?code\\_ID=151](https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=151)). ISO 639-2 Registration Authority - Library of Congress. Retrieved 2017-07-04. "Name: Fulah"
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6. (Arnett 1975: 5).
7. (Paradis 1992: 25).
8. (Arnett 1975: 74).
9. (McIntosh 1984:45-46).
10. (Arnott 1975: 5)
11. (McIntosh 1984:44)
12. Arnott, D. W. (1956). "The Middle Voice in Fula". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 18 (1): 130–144. doi:10.1017/S0041977X00122244 (<https://doi.org/10.1017%2FS0041977X00122244>). JSTOR 610132 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/610132>).

13. "...malgré son extension géographique et ses variations dialectales, le fulfulde reste une langue profondément unie." Ka, Fary. 1991. "Problématique de la standardisation linguistique: Le cas du pulaar/fulfulde." In N. Cyffer, ed., *Language Standardization in Africa*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske verlag. Pp. 35-38.
14. "B. Peul. Alphabet et Inventaire des sons représentés." page 8 (<http://www.bisharat.net/Documents/Bko66PeulTableau.html>) du *Rapport Final de la Réunion d'un groupe d'experts pour l'unification des alphabets des langues nationales* (<http://www.bisharat.net/Documents/Bamako1966.htm>), Bamako, 1966. (Presented on Bisharat.net)
15. *The Alphabet That Will Save a People From Disappearing* (<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/11/the-alphabet-that-will-save-a-people-from-disappearing/506987/>), Kaveh Waddell, Nov 16, 2016, The Atlantic
16. Hasson, Randall. "The ADLaM Story – How Alphabet Changes Culture" (<http://blog.randallmhasson.com/2014/04/the-adlam-story-how-a-lphabet-changes.html>). *The Randall M. Hasson Blog*. Retrieved 4 April 2018.
17. Bach, Deborah (29 July 2019). "Ibrahima & Abdoulaye Barry — How a new alphabet is helping an ancient people write its own future" (<https://news.microsoft.com/stories/people/adlam.html?ocid=lock>). *Story Labs*. Microsoft. Retrieved 25 December 2019.

## External links

- Fulfulde Ajami script how to (<https://web.archive.org/web/20180114133025/http://www.mafindi.com/blogs/1/10/how-to-write-fulfulde-in-ajami-baleri-e-masle>)
- Fula- Language Gulper (<http://www.languagesgulper.com/eng/Fula.html>)
- fulfulde app on googleplay (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.mafindi.android>)
- Fulfulde Language Family Report (SIL) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20180111154945/http://www-01.sil.org/silesr/2003/silesr2003-009.html>) – includes maps of the dialects
- D. W. Arnott. The Nominal and Verbal Systems of Fula General Introduction (<http://www.webpulaaku.net/defte/dwarnott/nominal-verbal-systems-fula/general-introduction.html>) webPulaaku
- Listen to a sample of Adamawa Fulfulde from Global Recordings Network (<http://globalrecordings.net/langcode/fub>)
- Adlam alphabet (<http://www.skyknowledge.com/adlam.htm>)

## Fula on the web

Below are some websites from different countries that use the Latin alphabet of Fula/Fulfulde:

- Nigeria: [www.mafindi.com](http://www.mafindi.com) (<http://www.mafindi.com/>)
- Nigeria: [fulfulde24.com](http://fulfulde24.com) (<http://fulfulde24.com>)
- Mauritania: [pulaar.org](http://pulaar.org) (<http://Pulaar.org>)
- Mauritania: [pulaagu.com](http://pulaagu.com) (<http://Pulaagu.com>)
- Guinea: [jowlol.org](http://jowlol.org) (<http://Jowlol.org>)
- Guinea: [tabaldefouta.org](http://tabaldefouta.org) (<http://Tabaldefouta.org>)
- Guinea: [misiide.net](http://misiide.net) (<http://Misiide.net>)
- Guinea: [webpulaaku.net](http://webpulaaku.net) (<http://Webpulaaku.net>)
- Sierra Leone: [peer.al.com](http://peer.al.com) (<http://Peeral.com>)
- Fuuta Tooro: [www.pulaaronline.com](http://www.pulaaronline.com) (<http://www.pulaaronline.com>)

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